# Part III: Running Out of Steam: Diminishing Returns on Educational Investment and Reform

Traditional education systems are essential in learning but they alone are not capable of serving the world’s growing and changing needs. We need to embrace new approaches from nontraditional sources and foster truly open and collaborate partnerships between the public, private and non-profit sectors. Those responsible for guiding learning must continually innovate to anticipate the needs of learners as the world around them changes.

People need to learn and relearn throughout their lives. By connecting and empowering learners and educators we can accelerate economic growth and improve social wellbeing worldwide.

For too long, we have considered learning in isolation. In most countries, “Education” is a separate branch of government policy, and a separate activity from our daily lives. In the future, learning will become substantially more important to every part of global society moving from educational systems towards a learning society.

## Significant Achievement Against Considerable Odds

Though education systems have not changed for over a century, the model of education that is prevalent across most of the world has done a remarkable job:

• From 1900 to 2000, estimated primary enrolment ratios increased from below 40% in many regions to 85% globally.

• In developing countries, literacy tripled from 25% to 75%, and average years of schooling more than doubled between 1960 and 1990 (from 2.1 to 4.4 years).

• The number of students enrolled in secondary school increased tenfold in the past 50 years, roughly from 50 million to 500 million.

## Diminishing Returns on Increasing Investment

However, the current education systems (even the high-performing ones) will never be able to meet the rising and challenging global demand for learning. Education systems are already failing to meet rising levels of demand:

• Approximately 759 million adults lack literacy skills today.

• About 72 million children of primary school age are not currently enrolled in school; nearly 71 million adolescents were out of school in 2007, almost one in five of the total age group.

• Of school-age children who enter primary school in developing countries, more than one in four drops out before being able to read and write.

Ten million new teachers will be needed to get an additional 260 million students into education systems in China, India, Indonesia, and Nigeria.

Existing education systems systematically fail large groups of society and reproduce many of the inequalities and disadvantages that have hindered our social and economic progress.

In many countries, student achievement is greatly affected by social class. In the United States, only 20 percent of children from low-income families achieve good grades when they leave school compared to a national average of 50 percent. There remains a large, persistent gap in achievement between white students and black and Latino students.

After rapid gains in the 1960s and 1970s, international test scores have been largely flat for a decade.

## Tinkering Toward Utopia: Incremental Improvement is Insufficient

Education systems were never designed and built to meet the new and endless global demand for learning.

In the words of Henry Ford: With incessant incremental reform, we are in danger of only breeding faster horses, not thinking again so that we can invent the car.

[](http://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilt:Henry_ford_1919.jpg)

Henry Ford

Education systems have long proved hard to reform from within – schools have developed a highly interdependent architecture, which makes it very expensive to customize learning opportunities. Interdependencies, ranging from the physical layout of schools to the role of centralized assessment and curriculum decisions, imprison schools within an inflexible instructional mode.

Decades after first attempting, many systems still struggle to adopt innovative practices that have emerged in community learning, informal adult education, work-based learning, and peer learning.

Education is politically charged, and seen as too important to toy with. The change that is now required is so radical that internal reform within the education sector will be insufficient. For established systems to play their full part, a new model of formal education is needed. We call it “Education 3.0.”

Creating Education 3.0 will be difficult and not on its own sufficient. Changes to formal education must be paired with an entirely new approach to informal learning and to models that blend the two. To meet the present challenge, schools, governments, societies, and learners must look elsewhere, too—to other sectors and around the world, often in unlikely places.